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ABSTRACT

In addressing the challenges facing the country into the 21st century, educational reform represents one of the key elements to assuring and sustaining the nation's economical, social, political, and cultural well-being. It is essential in any reform effort, moreover, that we identify and address the barriers to equal educational opportunity. Barriers can be described as horizontal (i.e., conditions that hinder goal attainment across disciplines, organizations, groups, or other levels) or vertical (i.e., perceived hierarchical levels that impede achievement within organizations, associations, groups, or systems). Many barriers are both horizontal and vertical and can include such elements as academic snobbery, cultural beliefs, financial issues, language problems, mind set, red tape, and tradition. An example of a vertical barrier occasioned by academic snobbery would be when instructors feel superior to those at other levels, such as high school teachers to elementary teachers or university professors to community college faculty. Horizontal barriers are created, however, when faculty minimize the value of counselors. In efforts to reform education, we must address the vertical and horizontal barriers represented by local, state, and federal bureaucracies; counter the prevailing cultural barrier that assumes that students cannot learn science or other "difficult" subjects; and eliminate all financial barriers to provide professional staff development and strong support system for students, the community, and the culture. (ECC)

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THE BARRIERS TO MOVING STUDENTS ALONG THE EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM

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THE BARRIERS TO MOVING STUDENTS ALONG THE EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM

Introduction

As we move rapidly toward the end of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century with great anticipation, our nation is being challenged around the world economically, politically, socially, and culturally. As a result, the quality and effectiveness of our education system is being questioned and challenged. One may choose to view this reality from a defensive posture or to see it as a positive challenge to be responsive to the legitimate concerns students, parents, employers, and citizens have regarding the American system of education.

There appears to be one certainty: Education reform and educational transformation is an essential ingredient to assuring and sustaining America's position and posture in the world. The United States is one of the few democracies in the world that ensure equal educational opportunity in its federal constitution while at the same time leaving the primary responsibility for education up to the respective states.

Given the constitutional commitment to equal educational opportunity and our societal interest in education opportunities for all people, it is natural, timely, and essential that we identify and address barriers that are negatively impacting the educational continuum. It is no longer acceptable that we provide quality education to only the 20 percent of our students who are college-bound and have lesser or lower expectations for the remaining 80 percent. It is also no longer acceptable that we assume some students, like women or minorities, can't learn math or science nor is it acceptable to be satisfied with how our students' score in basic skills compared with students from other countries of the world.

What then are some of the barriers that inhibit students from successfully moving along the educational continuum?

The Barriers

The December 1993 issue of *Centerfocus*, a publication of the National Center for Research for Vocational Education, has a compelling article written by Morton Iuger, staff writer for the Institute on Education and the Economy. In presenting his findings on "Teaching Collaboration in Secondary Schools, he identifies several barriers to generic collaboration. Identified barriers include: norms of privacy, status differences, and barriers between vocational and academic teachers who live in two separate worlds which encourage and support an "us versus them" mentality.

While this article is very insightful in the identification of barriers related to teacher collaboration, it overlooks a multitude of barriers that exist along the education continuum at the local, state, regional,

and national level. Listed below in alphabetical order are 43 potential barriers. Each may be described as either a horizontal barrier or a vertical barrier or a combination of both. I am confident the reader could add other real or potential barriers to this list. It is not suggested that the barriers listed are all inclusive.

A horizontal barrier is defined here as one which inhibits or impedes the accomplishment of goals across disciplines, organizations, structures, groups, associations, or other common levels. A vertical barrier, for purposes of discussion here, represents an impediment or condition which inhibits or resists the accomplishment of goals due to perceived hierarchical levels within an organization, association, group, or system.

BARRIERS

H = Horizontal Barrier **V = Vertical Barrier** **B = Both**

1 Academic Snobbery	B	16 Educational	B	31 Political	B
2 Accreditation	B	17 Elitist	B	32 Prejudice	B
3 Administrative	B	18 Egotistical	B	33 Professional	B
4 Affiliation	B	19 Financial/Economic	B	34 Protectionism	B
5 Attitudinal	B	20 Gatekeeper	B	35 Red Tape	B
6 Association	B	21 Geographical	B	36 Seat Time	B
7 Bean Counting	B	22 Hierarchial	B	37 Security	B
8 Bias	B	23 Historical	B	38 Self-serving	B
9 Bureaucratic	B	24 Hoops	B	39 Status	B
10 Burnout	B	25 Language	B	40 Structural	B
11 Certification	B	26 Legalistic	B	41 Tracking	B
12 Collaboration	B	27 Legislative	B	42 Tradition	B
13 Communication	B	28 Mind Set	B	43 Stereotyping	B
14 Cultural	B	29 Organizational	B		
15 Curriculum	B	30 Physical	B		

Some Illustrative Examples

Academic Snobbery Barriers

Vertical. High school teachers sometimes feel they are better than elementary teachers, community college teachers may look down their noses at high school teachers, and university professors know they are superior to all of the above.

Horizontal. Academic faculty create a feeling of second-class citizenship among vocational and technical faculty, and all faculty devalue the role and importance of guidance and counseling.

Association Barriers

Horizontal. Association barriers seem to be most prevalent at the state and national levels. Associations, by the nature of their membership and leadership, often unknowingly promote isolation and

discourage collaboration and cooperation. Because they share no common agenda and because they do not talk with each other, the consequence is all too frequently fear of each other and lack of trust.

Vertical. As one moves up the association ladder, it is not at all unusual to find that there is a tendency to resist new ideas and change, and more of an interest in maintaining the status quo and "not rocking the boat." As a result, cutting-edge change frequently begins at the lower levels or completely outside of recognized associations.

Bureaucratic Barriers

Vertical. In many states, separate bureaucracies have been created to serve, protect, and promote the vested interests of their members and constituents. For example, K-12 education is represented by one bureaucracy, community colleges are represented by another, and "higher education" is served by yet another bureaucracy. In many instances, their working relationships with each other is strained at best and non-existent or adversarial at worst.

Horizontal. At the local, state, and federal levels, a classic example of horizontal barriers exists which negatively impacts our effectiveness in serving students and addressing work force issues. Multiple agencies frequently compete for funds to serve their constituents. In some instances, there is duplication of services, for example, between "competing" agencies rather than collaboration or cooperation among the agencies.

Cultural Barriers

Horizontal. As a culture, teachers, parents, and students practice a belief system which suggests that not all students are capable of learning math or science or other "hard" subjects. This **attitudinal** barrier, suggests the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, is the first issue that must be addressed in correcting the problem of 70 to 80 percent of all students being turned off by mathematics and science before their sophomore year in high school.

Gatekeeper Barriers

Under the guise of ensuring quality, integrity, and standards, we have schools, agencies, organizations, and associations that challenge anything that is not consistent with maintaining the status quo. An excellent example is the quality issue related to integration of academic and vocational education. We know that contextual learning is superior to non-contextual learning, but it challenges our comfort zone so we resist it even though it is more effective for all students.

Structural Barriers

Horizontal and Vertical. Buzz words like "seamless education" are wonderful, but a quick look at the table of organization of any school district, college, or university will quickly reveal the level and extent of our commitment. We talk cooperation and collaboration but "model" and practice autonomy

and individualism. After all, the John Wayne frontier mentality is a significant part of our cultural heritage. We talk teamwork but create vertical and horizontal structures which thwart our most sincere efforts.

Financial/Economic Barriers

Horizontal and Vertical. As educational advocates of life-long learning, we do little to promote, encourage, and celebrate professional staff development. Teachers work hard. Doing an outstanding job is extremely demanding. Providing a strong support system is an essential component. We must provide no less than the best for our students, our community, and our culture. Financial and economic support is essential to move our educational system into the 21st Century.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are at an extremely critical crossroad in American education. Maintaining the same is clearly not acceptable. What we need to do is reflected in the recommendation below.

Recommendation

Seek out and find committed individuals throughout the educational continuum with a vision of where we should be going, a passion to make it happen, and the courage to engage in "Barrier Blasting" to ensure that all students along the education continuum are assured the opportunity of being all they are capable of becoming.